

Collect: MERCIFUL GOD, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warning and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Mark 1:1-8

Sermon: Today we begin the second week of Advent and we commemorate the four Sundays of Advent by lighting candles. A candle is lit the first week of Advent then it and successive candles are lit the following weeks. The candles are symbols for the light of Christ. Each week is focused on a certain theme. The order of the themes may vary, such as Joy, Faith, Love and Hope or the order can be Hope (or Promise), Preparation (or Waiting), Joy (Peace) or Love (Adoration).

Regardless of the themes order, the wait is still for the coming of Christ to bring God's love to his people.

In the Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah is prophesying about the coming of God to end the suffering of the Jews who are in exile in Babylon. He tells them that God has forgiven them of their sins and will restore them to a good loving relationship with him. He will restore Jerusalem to its greatness. A voice will cry out in the wilderness for the people to prepare for the coming of the Lord. And when he comes, "He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead the mother sheep.” Of course, as he leads the mother sheep the others will follow.

This is such a peaceful representation of the day the Lord comes to the people in exile. Where there had been despair and an uncertainty as to when the torture of being a captive would end. All is going to be replaced with jubilation because Isaiah tells them God has forgiven them of their sins and will love them again.

The Babylonian Exile did end and God restored Jerusalem to greatness. Yet there is still the need for the Jewish people to make some changes in the way they are living and their relationship to God.

The voice now, crying out in the wilderness is John the Baptist, he too like Isaiah tells the people to prepare, get ready for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah, the Anointed one. He preaches with a voice of fire and proclaims baptism for repentance of sins. He stresses that there is one coming after him, whose message and actions will be stronger than his. He is forecasting the coming of Jesus Christ who will baptize them with the Holy Spirit, the presence of God, instead of water. And again, the sins of man will be forgiven.

The ministry of Jesus will be about love and forgiveness. Once again, God illustrates to man that he doesn't want to destroy man, but love him.

What is the problem with man/us? Why can't we accept God's forgiveness and live a happy problem free life?

I think the problem is that God allows us to think, make decisions, and have choices. You may have heard this called "Free Will." The problem seems to be that God doesn't place hard fast restrictions on us at all times. Now we are free to decide to do anything we want whether we are Christians or not. We can hear the Good News being preached, read the Bible, serve as church leaders, even church ministers. We can, at any time choose any action we wish to take. The restriction being that for each action, there is a reaction. The action we take decides whether the reaction is a good one or a bad one.

Sometimes we are so entwined in the chaos of the personal hells we are in or even have created that there seems to be only one solution. That solution is prayer and our cry is, "Come Lord Jesus, get me out of this mess!"

Like the people of the Babylonian Exile and the people who lived during the time of Jesus, we still live in a time where we call on Jesus and expect deliverance. Why? He promised that in baptism the old man died and a new man arose in a resurrection with him. To this new man is promised forgiveness of sins and God's presence, the Holy Spirit will always be with him.

The Holy Spirit will be a teacher, protector and conveyor of God's love.

So, in this Advent season, we like the people of biblical times, wait on the Second Coming and our cry is "Come Lord Jesus." Amen.

Rev. Lionel